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ABSTRACT

This paper was designed to show that the two seemingly disparate concepts of andragogy (the study of how adults learn) and whole language are compatible and should be considered by planners and implementers of adult literacy programs. Guiding principles that both andragogy and whole language share are: (1) active participation of learners; (2) use of real-life situations; (3) learners learn best when they have a need; and (4) learning is built upon past experiences. Whole language strategies suitable for the adult learner include: the language experience approach; use of meaningful texts; retelling and reacting; writing to solve everyday needs or problems; and strategy instruction. A middle-level manager in a large corporation worked in a tutorial situation for a year-and-a-half to improve his reading and writing skills. The tutor used a variety of whole language approaches suitable for adult learners. To motivate the adult literacy learner, the tutor used the manager's Vietnam War experiences and his desire to read and write to and for his kindergarten child. Many adult literacy learners, such as this manager, can profit from instruction that combines whole language principles and andragogy. (RS)

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ANDRAGOGY AND WHOLE LANGUAGE: A PERFECT MATCH

INTRODUCTION

On first glance, there appears to be little if any similarity between Andragogy and Whole Language. Andragogy, the study of how adults learn was initiated by those who studied adult learning for those who work with adults. Whole Language, a philosophy of teaching reading and writing, was developed by psycholinguists and educators for teachers of elementary school children. This presentation, however, will show how these two seemingly disparate concepts are compatible and should be considered together by those planners and implementers of adult literacy programs.

ANDRAGOGY AND WHOLE LANGUAGE

Andragogy was first mentioned in the United States in 1967 by Malcolm Knowles who heard about the term from Dusan Savicevic, a Yugoslavian educator. Knowles introduced the term in an article written for the journal *Adult Leadership*. (Knowles, 1984) Recognizing the fact that adults are not large children and therefore educational practices based on pedagogy, the science and practice of educating children, were not appropriate, he discussed and since has expanded on the following assumptions about adults:

1. They bring wide experience to learning situations.
2. They have a need to be responsible for their own learning.
3. They are motivated to learn when the learning helps them solve immediate problems and/or cope with life.
4. They need to know the reasons why they should learn something.

(Knowles, 1980, 1984)

A movement was begun, also in the 1960's, by Kenneth Goodman, a psycholinguist. Recognizing that children learn to speak naturally without formal instruction, Goodman transferred

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what he and others believed to be the reasons for the miraculous development of oral language facility to a philosophy of teaching children to read and write called Whole Language. (Goodman, 1968) Following are the guiding principles of the Whole Language philosophy:

1. Language (reading and writing) are best learned in real-life situations.
2. Children learn language because of a need.
3. Children should be actively involved in their learning.
4. Instruction should build on and add to an individual's experiences.

(Goodman, 1968 and Edelsky, et al, 1991)

Viewing the principles underlying Andragogy and Whole Language side-by-side reveals how they converge. Whole Language suggests that children need to be active participants in their learning. Andragogy tells us that the goal of learning for adults is independence and that for this to occur, adults need to be actively involved in all stages of their educational program, or in other words, active participants.

Goodman and other proponents of Whole Language write that children need to read and write in meaningful situations rather than in isolated skills activities that are ends in themselves. (Goodman, 1986 and Crafton, 1991) Research has shown us that adults with reading and writing needs do not continue in literacy programs that teach them to recognize, sound out, and write isolated letters. (Soifer, et al, 1990) They, too, appear to learn best in meaningful situations.

Advocates of both Whole Language and Andragogy stress the importance of the learner's past experiences. Adults, *even non readers*, have acquired wide experiences just from living. They, like children, bring these experiences to any learning situation. These experiences enable them to relate to and contribute to new learning.

Finally, both Andragogy and the Whole Language philosophy suggest that learners learn best when they have a need for that learning. Recognizing that what they are learning will solve a problem or help to achieve a goal motivates the child or adult to work harder. The concept of relevancy also implies that the reading and writing activities must be purposeful and authentic, rather

than artificial and isolated

WHOLE LANGUAGE STRATEGIES SUITABLE FOR THE ADULT LEARNER

Now that we have explored the compatiblilty of the underlying principles of Whole Language and Andragogy, I should like to discuss some strategies currently used in Whole Language classroom that can be adapted to the adult literacy learner.

Throughout the presentation, I refer to an adult, Mr. G. who worked with me in a tutorial situation for a period of a year and a half. Mr. G., a middle-level manager in a large corporation, initially told me he wished help with reading and writing to prepare for a college-level program. It became apparent, however, that Mr. G. had serious deficiencies in both reading and writing. Once he admitted that he wasn't ready for college at this time, he set some more immediate and reachable goals: to improve his reading so he could read to his kindergarten child and to work on his writing so he could write notes to the kindergarten teacher and his subordinates at work. As we reached goals, he set new ones

Language Experience Approach

Long used as a technique to help beginning readers in kindergarten and first grade make the connection between oral and written language, the Language Experience Approach is invaluable as a strategy for adults. The foundation of the LEA is the experience of the learner. Because of the richness of experiences amassed by an adult, this approach allows them to explore the issues and experiences that are relevant. With the assistance of an instructor, the adult can discuss and ultimately dictate or write ideas (depending on ability). The resultant written material can then be used to expand reading vocabulary. The LEA therefore uses the experiences of the adult while providing meaningful texts.

Mr. G. was a veteran of the Vietnam War. He and I spent many sessions discussing and then writing down his recollections. These stories were the basis for subsequent skill and vocabularydevelopment meetings. He frequently told me how helpful it was to reflect on such a painful period of his life. Mr. G. was so proud of his stories that he read them to his children.

Use of Meaningful Texts

Adults need to make the connection between what they dictate or write in the LEA's and published materials. Instructors can help with this linkage by providing an assortment of materials that are related to the adult's LEA stories and interests. If a relevant reading selection is difficult, the instructor can read it aloud. With reading matter that is at a more appropriate level, the adult can read all or part of it himself or herself. A discussion should preced and follow the reading, regardless of who does the reading.

I collected reading material about Vietnam (the country and the war) for Mr. G. We read about the Vietnam memorial, disclosures about Agent Orange, and a short story about another soldier's experiences in the war. The interest level, throughout these sessions, was very high. Because of his desire to read to his son, we practiced reading picture books. Mr. G commented that he too enjoyed reading the books and regretted never having read these books when he was young.

Retelling and Reacting

One way to develop vocabulary and comprehension is to tell someone else about what we read (retelling). Rather than responding to isolated questions about the text, retellings help the learner organize thoughts and ideas and enhance the reader's understanding of material. These retellings can be oral or written and can be as simple as telling someone else about what was read or jotting down in a journal what the reading meant to the reader.

Mr. G. kept a Vietnam journal in which he reacted to what we read together, commented on his feelings, and summarized news items he read or heard about on television. After seeing a film about Vietnam, he wrote a poem that he shared with me.

Writing

Whole Language educators recognize the similarities between reading and writing, both being based on language. (Edelski, et al, 1991) Adults, even those who fear writing, need to have opportunities to write. This writing can and should take many forms, depending on the needs and

interests of the adult writer. The adult might keep a diary-type journal or react in writing to what he or she is reading. The important thing is that the learner should be encourage to use writing to solve everyday needs or problems.

While Mr. G. and I worked together, we completed an information form he needed to register his child for school, wrote excuse notes when his boy was absent and some memos for work in addition to his Vietnam War journal. Wanting to contact soldiers he served with, Mr. G. and I composed a letter to the Veteran's Administration that resulted in addresses and subsequent correspondence to old friends. (The responses he received became additional reading material that was most motivating.) Initially, Mr. G. was reluctant to write. His first efforts were brief, but as he noticed progress, his writings increased in length. To help him see progress, I had him date all writing which he kept in a folder. We reviewed periodically the materials in the folder.

Strategy Instruction

Proponents of Whole Language recognize that readers and writers encounter difficulties when they read and write. (Crafton, 1991) The children might meet a word they are unable to decode or be unable to construct grammatically a sentence that contains two ideas. Rather than teaching skills in sequence to all children in the class, Whole Language teachers believe that individual learners need to learn those skills that will help with the difficulties encountered.

This belief is most appropriate for adults for several reasons. There is no agreed upon sequence of skills necessary to learn to read or write. In addition, adults frequently have an urgency to learn and often get frustrated when presented with a lengthy step-by-step approach to learning to read or write. Therefore, those who work with adults can develop strategy lessons from needs that emerge from the LEA's, journals, and miscues and comprehension difficulties that occur when reading published material.

Mr. G. consistently had difficulty with suffixes, both in reading and writing. Helping him to understand the differences, both phonetically and semantically, in specific endings resulted in marked improvement. Reading and analyzing sentences that transmitted a complete idea helped him to write coherent, complete thoughts. Recognizing his need for these specific strategies motivated

Mr. G. to work with me toward improvement.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this presentation was to help you see how the underlying principles of Whole Language and Andragogy match and how they can enhance the literacy learning of adults. I referred to my interactions with Mr. G. to help you see the applicability of the principles and usability of the strategies in the real world of adult literacy instruction. There are many Mr. G's out there who can profit from instruction when we combine the principles of Whole Language and Andragogy.

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